

Internal Divisions in the History of the Church

Merciful God will grant the times of our most radiant happiness to implement this deed of recreating in the Church of God what has been destroyed, uniting in the union of truth what has been divided, connecting in the love of the Apostolic faith what has been disjoined, and gathering in the unity of the Apostolic truth what has been dispersed...

- Epistle of 125 Western bishops to the Sixth Ecumenical Council

Over her entire history, the Holy Church of Christ has been tempted by various divisions. Some of them resulted in schisms and heresies so that entire communities fell away. Most secessions from the Church were caused by heretical doctrines. History also knows secessions from the Church which took the form of schisms caused by canonical or disciplinary rather than doctrinal matters. These are the Novatian, Donatist and other schisms. Ecumenical and Local Councils ruled that these schismatic communities had nothing in common with the Body of the Church. However, history also knows many divisions and reconciliations *within* the Church. Such divisions are essentially different from secessions *from* the Church. A secession from the Church takes place when heretics or schismatics are excommunicated or leave the Church themselves, while a division within the Church occurs when Orthodox Christians are divided. In a division within the Church, both parties are Orthodox, both abide within the Church, although they may be split by machinations of false teachers, violent acts of civil authorities or matters which can eventually be reconciled and healed. One can hardly find in history an age of complete internal calm or tranquility. Divisions within the Church have taken place rather often. Sometimes they were just disagreements, which, as the Apostle says, are unavoidable, and sometimes severe and protracted strife. Some were caused by false teachers, with disputes arising among Orthodox Christians concerning the ways and methods of combating their wrong doctrines. In some cases, dissent was sowed by civil authorities when they endeavored to force their will upon the Church, and an internal division proved to be the Church's protection from hostile influence.

There are two extremes in attitudes to divisions, both deviating from the genuine teaching of the Orthodox faith. The first extreme claims that all divisions, including heresies, sects and schisms, are divisions within the Church of Christ. This viewpoint does not acknowledge a secession from the Christian Church. This idea underlies the false teaching of ecumenism, influenced by Protestantism. The other extreme, influenced by Roman Catholicism, claims that the Church cannot have any internal divisions, any temptations or any maladies at all. This extreme can be easily embraced by those who, in their striving for the unity of the Church or their insensible zeal, forget that the enemy of humankind is always there to destroy the peace of the Church of Christ and sow discord among believers. "The ancient evil enemy, the devil, has never ceased, at various times, to divide and dissect the Church, founded on the Apostles and Prophets," says the epistle of Saint Patriarch Tarasius to the Roman Pope Hadrian, included in the *Acts* of the 7th Ecumenical Council. However, such divisions within the Church are not victories of the devil; they rather attest to the harsh struggle against him. Internal Church divisions are a common malady rather than a death, and they are healable.

Speaking of divisions within the Church, acts of the Ecumenical Councils say that the Church is “divided”, “torn apart” or “cleaved”, that there arises a “barrier of hostility” or a “barrier of protection”. They also speak of a “schism in Church unity”. To avoid such internal divisions, the Church prays at each liturgy: “give peace to Thy world, to Thy churches, to the priests and to all Thy people”. St. Gregory the Theologian speaks of such division in his *Discourse on Peace*: “The true Body of Christ began to be divided and dissected so that our bones had been all but scattered nigh unto hades.”

Dissents and divisions within the Church are usually prudently passed over in silence, to avoid temptations. However, several may be mentioned in order to give believers an example of how to live and act without losing heart in the face of difficulties. Some Holy Fathers were abused and banished for their peacemaking efforts; others looked for a firm foundation for unity but could not readily find it; some made mistakes of ignorance. The most successful peacemakers were those who acted with the greatest humility and self-reproach and took upon themselves the greatest hardships of pacification. The greatest feats were performed by those who sacrificed most and acted without any personal interest. Genuine peacemakers were often viewed with hostility by both parties; at times true peacemakers came from the ranks of those who preferred to meticulously prepare a firm ground for unity rather than rush into unification. However, such people never had irreconcilable spirits. True partisans of peace most often were tolerant of their more cautious brothers and did not seek a way to peace through denunciation of the cautious ones. Caution itself usually resulted from zeal. And *vice versa*, among the peacemakers, some cared for their own supremacy and the subservience of others, for possession of property and rights-these became the smallest.

Divisions and reconciliations in the Church date back to the Old Testament Patriarchs themselves; their story is long and varied. Jacob earnestly wanted peace with his brother Esau, although the latter had wished to kill him. To make peace with his brother, he did not spare rich gifts. When Jacob came back from his exile, the brothers reconciled without disputing primogeniture.

The righteous Joseph in Egypt did not revenge himself upon his brothers who had sold him into slavery. He embraced them without even demanding repentance for this outrageous deed. And here the joy of reconciliation partook of no claim of supremacy.

An important division in the Old Testament Church came about during Joshua’s reign, when the Tribes of Ruben and Gad and half the Tribe of Manasseh living beyond the Jordan, erected themselves an altar. The Holy Scriptures say that all the remaining Tribes gathered and decided to make war on them, laying the entire Transjordanian land waste in punishment for initiating this schism. However, Phineas, son of the priest Eleazar, became a peacemaker. He asked for explanations from the people beyond the Jordan, and they assured him that they had not intended to make sacrifices at the altar. It was meant merely as a likeness to preclude the local people from abandoning the faith in One God due to the remoteness of the main altar. The others approved this deed, according to the Holy Scriptures (Joshua 22:30), and peace was restored in the Old Testament Church.

A severe internal division arose among the Jewish people under the Judge Jephthah the Gileadite. The Tribe of Ephraim accused Jephthah of not inviting them to the war against the Ammonites and promised to burn him together with his entire house. First Jephthah called for peace (Judges 12:3), then he gathered all the Gileadites and defeated his accusers. The hostility between the coreligionists was so strong that the victors killed at the ford every man of the Tribe of Ephraim who was betrayed by his speech. "And there fell at that time of the Ephraimites forty and two thousand" (Judges 12:6). The Holy Scriptures say that soon thereafter the Jewish people became depraved, and the sons of Israel were given into the hands of the Philistines for forty years.

A very destructive division of the Old Testament people came about after the liberation from the Philistines and the death of Samson. When a Levite's wife was slain in Gibeah, a city of the Tribe of Benjamin, all other Tribes of the Israelites demanded that the depraved people of Gibeah be put to death. However, the Tribe of Benjamin arose as one man. The sons of Benjamin were wrong. The Holy Scriptures say that God Himself blessed all Tribes to defeat the Tribe of Benjamin in battle, however, the victors transgressed the divine blessing, becoming ruthless and perpetrating great evils. They put to sword and fire all people and all cities of Benjamin so that just six hundred men of the entire Tribe survived on Mount Rimmon. Only then was peace declared. All the people prayed to God in tears, in repentance, for the extermination of an entire Tribe. Together they erected an altar and made bloodless sacrifices to God. It is hard to imagine what a great abyss divided the Jews in those days. Reconciliation was very difficult, and maybe precisely for the sake of this reconciliation God chose as king Saul who was of the Tribe of Benjamin. It may have been God's providence; the King from the outcast Tribe became a peacemaker for the entire people.

A new division ensued in the end of Saul's reign, when he fell out of God's grace, and God chose the holy Prophet and Psalmist David. Most people loved David for his gentle ways, but some in their false obedience to King Saul held David for traitor and sought to kill him. Both parties believed in the True God but were divided by hostility. In his bitterness Saul went as far as ordering to kill eighty-five priests and burn to ashes their town Nob, together with women and children, merely because they had given shelter to David. One might believe that after the murder of priests Saul no longer deserved peace; however, the humble David went on calling Saul King, considering himself to be his servant and calling for peace. David had twice an opportunity to kill Saul, still he consciously declined to do that. The Holy Prophet and Psalmist showed mercy even though the Holy Scriptures say of Saul, "the Lord is departed from thee, and is become thine enemy" (1 Samuel 28:16). This shows that the Prophet offered peace even to a man who was called enemy of God. And he is praised for this love of peace.

The division among the people continued even after the death of Saul when most Israelites rebelled against David, anointing Saul's son Ishbaal as King. Only a minority stood by David. Although Ishbaal waged an unjust bloody war against David, the latter always strove for peace and did not even call Ishbaal his enemy. When Ishbaal was treacherously killed in his bed by his retainers, David lamented his death calling him "a righteous person" (2 Samuel 4:11), although in everybody's opinion this man was to blame for the fratricidal war.

Much later all Tribes except the Tribe of Judah again rose against David. They proclaimed his son Absalom King, and David again had to flee. When we read the Psalms, we hear many times David praying God to save him from the enemy's pursuit. It is even more lamentable that the Prophet's persecutors were his coreligionist brothers believing in the True God, rather than pagans. In the course of the war against Absalom David also always strove for peace. When internecine strife was unavoidable, he asked his generals to try their utmost that Absalom's life be spared, and when he nevertheless was defeated with his entire army and died, David was deeply sorrowed and did not rejoice in his victory. One can hear the truth in the Psalmist's words "My soul hath long dwelt with him that hateth peace" (Psalms 120:6). The following event excellently describes the peace-loving spirit of the Holy Psalmist. One of Saul's kinsmen openly scolded David and threw stones at him. David's people asked him to let them put the evil-wisher to death. Still, the King and Prophet's love of peace was steadfast. He stopped his servants with the words "let him alone, and let him curse; for the Lord hath bidden him. It may be that the Lord will look on mine affliction, and that the Lord will requite me good for his cursing this day" (2 Samuel 16:11-12). The Holy Psalmist won his enemies' hearts by calling for peace, naming them his brothers, his flesh and blood and even inviting Abishai, the commander of the hostile army, to command his troops. To invite the archenemy to command one's own army shows genuine holiness. Only this holy sacrificial love allowed David to restore peace among his people.

Divisions among the Jewish people sometimes directly afflicted the Old Testament Church. For example, in the end of David's reign some of his people proclaimed his senior son Adonijah King in circumvention of the heir Solomon. High priest Abiathar took part in the proclamation. However, this was done in violation of King David's will. He ordered that prophet Nathan and priest Zadok anoint Solomon as King. The division was healed. Adonijah and his supporters were forgiven, and Zadok became high priest instead of Abiathar. Here, too, reconciliation took place due to the spirit of love and mercy.

Sometimes divisions among the Jews occurred in accordance with God's will to avoid sins and dangers. Prophet Isaiah refers to such divisions when he says: "I make peace, and create evil: I the Lord do all these things" (Is. 45:7). Even before Solomon's death, prophet Ahijah the Shilonite told the future Israelite King Jeroboam: "thus saith the Lord, the God of Israel, Behold, I will rend the kingdom out of the hand of Solomon, and will give ten tribes to thee; one Tribe will remain his" (1 Kings 11: 31-32). This was done in order to protect a portion of the Old Testament people from pagan customs; however, Solomon failed to understand God's design and wanted to kill Jeroboam as a schismatic. This caused a new division within the people. After Solomon's death all Tribes except Judah and Benjamin (that is, a majority of the people) deserted his son Rehoboam. Rehoboam was already going to wage war on his brothers for promoting schism, when the righteous man Shemaiah was inspired by God to announce: "Thus saith the Lord, Ye shall not go up, nor fight against your brethren the children of Israel: return every man to his house; for this thing is from me" (1 Kings 12:24). This division had come about before Jeroboam's fall into paganism. Reconciliation of two Kingdoms ensued only after the repentance of the Israeli King Ahab, under Jehosaphat, King of Judah. It is the Holy Prophet Elijah who is to be credited with this reconciliation of the people in the Truth.

And the prophet Jeremiah, speaking of a shaky peace, said, "They have treated the wound of my people carelessly, saying, 'Peace, peace,' when there is no peace." (Jeremiah 6:14).

As Nebuchadnezzar, the King of Babylon, approached Jerusalem, the Jews were once again divided. The Book of Jeremiah relates that when the prophet enjoined Zedekiah, the last King of Judah, to surrender to Nebuchadnezzar, he refused because of the enmity of the Jews who had already given up resistance (Jeremiah 38:1-9). Zedekiah believed in the True God but ignored the denunciatory words of prophet Jeremiah. Believers in God must have been both in the ranks of those who had surrendered to the Babylonian king and those who went on fighting. The prophet describes these times of internecine strife in his words: "Behold, I will fill all the inhabitants of this land, even the kings that sit upon David's throne, and the priests, and the prophets, and all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, with drunkenness. And I will dash them one against another" (Jeremiah 13:13-14), and also: "we looked for peace, and there is no good; and for the time of healing, and behold trouble!" (Jeremiah 14:19). Probably the people became reconciled only in the Babylonian captivity.

Divisions and struggles among the Jews arose not only in times of trouble but also in times of God's special blessings. Not always were the causes political; often they were purely religious. For example, when after the Babylonian exile the people started rebuilding the Temple, not all believers in the True God were allowed to take part. Builders from the Tribes of Judah and Benjamin precluded some believers from participation, referring to an order of the Persian King Cyrus. Those who were excluded led others away and sowed discord among the people so that construction was even suspended for two years until the accession of Darius to power (2 Ezra 5:70). However, the Holy Scriptures say that those who were not allowed to build the Temple also worshipped God and made sacrifices to Him (2 Ezra 5:66).

The next division directly affected the Church and her leadership. In the beginning of the reign of Antiochus Epiphanus, the righteous high priest Onias was ousted by the impious Jason. The latter bribed Antiochus Epiphanus to be promoted to the high priest's rank. The Holy Scriptures call Jason "ungodly wretch, and no high priest" (2 Maccabees 4:13). Menelaus who succeeded Jason was as impious and corrupt. The impiety of the high priests did not affect the Temple's sacraments; however, it provoked the people's justified indignation and division. The false high priest Menelaus issued orders to kill the ousted Onias and suppress the people's dissent. He probably believed that unity of the Church could be achieved through violence. It caused a division among the people and priests. Josephus Flavius tells in his History of the Jewish War how some sought support against their brothers from the Syrian Antiochus Epiphanus, and others from the Egyptian Ptolemy. The son of the assassinated Onias, also called Onias, fled to Egypt where Ptolemy allowed him to build a second Temple with an altar and perform all the rites of worship there. This happened just after Antiochus Epiphanus had taken Jerusalem, turned the Temple into a pagan sanctuary and unleashed severe persecution of believers in the True God. This persecution punished everybody who sought Antiochus' support in their struggle against their brothers. The other party which had sought support in Egypt was punished by the persecution under Ptolemy Philopator. The Third Book of Maccabees relates how Philopator hated the Jewish people in Egypt and would have killed them all, down to the last child, had a miracle not happened. In those years the temple in Egypt

had unified all the emigration about it. After Jerusalem had been liberated by Judas Maccabeus and sacrifices had been resumed in her temple, the Egyptian temple continued to exist. Reconciliation with the emigration did not result in its destruction. It existed even in the days of the Savior's earthly life. Josephus Flavius says that the Old Testament nation recognized the emigration temple in Egypt. To justify its existence, prophecies from the Holy Scriptures were cited.

The last important division within the Old Testament Church took place under the high priest Hyrcanus, son of Alexander Jannaeus, great-grandson of Simon Maccabeus and contemporary of Julius Caesar. Some of the people stood by the high priest, while others supported his brother, King Aristobulus. Enmity led to military clashes with much bloodshed. The high priest then appealed to Rome for help. The Roman general Pompey with a large army took Jerusalem by storm, and half of the people of their own will fought on the side of the Romans against their coreligionists. The other half resisted the Romans courageously, sincerely believing in God's help. Josephus Flavius relates that when Romans broke into the Temple, they were surprised to see that, despite the bloodshed around them, the priests were piously worshipping, paying no heed to what was happening around them and making no efforts to save their lives. This shows the clergy's strong faith, although they were in strife with their high priest Hyrcanus. The Roman interference further aggravated the internal hostility. High priest Hyrcanus was declared king by the Romans; however, some people held the Romans for invaders and resisted them. The defeated enemies of Rome fled and continued their struggle under the banners of zealots. This happened exactly 100 years before the crucifixion of our Savior. Zealots often showed the people an example of courage and uncompromising faith, still they were deeply hostile towards the partisans of the Romans. Reconciliation was then impossible. The people and the clergy tried to protect the zealots and pacify everybody, but Herod was the main instigator of discord. He had all lawful heirs to the throne assassinated or banished. The king and high priest Hyrcanus with some of his people had to flee to Parthia, where they were in hiding for many years. The majority of the people recognized the exiled Hyrcanus rather than Herod as King. Josephus Flavius mentions that Herod wrote deceitful letters to the emigrants and Hyrcanus saying that time had come to reconcile. The emigrants tried to dissuade Hyrcanus from believing Herod, but he simpleheartedly returned to Jerusalem and was immediately put to death. The zealot emigrants in Parthia could not accept the fact that Herod in Jerusalem began to appoint, dismiss and execute high priests according to his own will. This was done in gross violation of all laws; and yet, despite the illegality of the election of high priests, the sacrifices in the Temple were effectual. According to Josephus Flavius in his History of the Jewish War, after Herod's death, high priests were appointed by Archelaus, and the last five high priests before Caiaphas were appointed by Roman procurators. Anyone saying that election of high priests by godless people is usual should remember Caiaphas. The strife with the zealots continued into the earthly life of our Savior.

At the Savior's birth, the song of Angels proclaimed that true peace had been brought to the world, and God Himself is often called in the Holy Scriptures God of Peace. Peace is one of the gifts of the Holy Ghost; it was commanded by Christ to His disciples in the words "have peace one with another" (Mark 9:50). In His last conversation with the disciples, the Savior

said: “Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you” (John 14:27). Obviously, true peace is very different from the shaky peace referred to in the sentences “I came not to send peace, but a sword” (Matthew 10:34) and “For when they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them” (1 Thessalonians 5:3).

The New Testament Church was from the very beginning prone to the temptations of division. For example, Apostle Paul in his *Epistles* enjoined the Corinthian Christians to avoid divisions. Later, the troubles in the Corinthian Church intensified. To pacify the Christians, St. Clement of Rome wrote his *Epistle to Corinthians*. There were some peace-haters among the Corinthians, who confused and divided the believers. It seems that pacification of the Church could not be achieved by merely excommunicating the trouble-makers. St. Clement addresses not the instigators but the sensible Christians, warning them not to believe the lovers of dissent. This shows that the division had put forth deep roots.

A major dispute within the Church concerned the date of Pascha, when Pope St. Victor of Rome excommunicated the Asian Churches for celebrating Pascha on 14 Nisan. Eusebius of Caesarea says: “Not all of the Bishops liked it, however; some called upon Victor to think of peace, unity with brothers and love”. These words show that some Bishops did support Victor in his excommunication of the brothers, while others, foremost among them St. Irenaeus of Lyons, opposed the division firmly. The Church considered both parties to the conflict to be her children. Due to the peacemakers’ efforts, the division within the Church was not aggravated, and the date of Pascha celebration was finally decided by the First Ecumenical Council.

In the early third century the Roman Church split under Pope St. Callistus (217-222). Part of his flock headed by St. Hippolytus of Rome was divided from him. The dissenters could not accept the fact that the new Pope, unlike his predecessors, ordained people who had entered into a second and even third marriage, and reestablished communion with all those who had been previously excommunicated. The Church did not consider either of these groups as schismatic. Callistus was recognized as the Pope of Rome and the majority stood by him, while St. Hippolytus was venerated for his devotion and scholarship and later became Bishop of the Roman suburb Ostia. Professor Bolotov believes that the division lasted till 235, when both parties in the Roman Church reconciled and elected St. Anterus to be the new Bishop of Rome. Even if in this case both groups acted in brotherly love, sixteen years later, in 251, when such disputes arose again, one of the parties did not strive for peace. The dispute resulted in the Novatian schism and the Novatians left the Church for good.

The division that came about in the Alexandrian Church under St. Dionysius of Alexandria had political causes. Egypt seceded from Rome and proclaimed its own Emperor. Some believers in Alexandria supported him, while others remained loyal to Emperor Gallienus. Eusebius of Caesarea cites in his *Ecclesiastical History* an extract from the letter of St. Dionysius discussing this division within the Church. The letter shows that the holy Alexandrian hierarch tried his utmost to reconcile the warring factions, remaining above the division. The Patriarch took this division as a division in his own soul, even saying that because of the troubles he could not talk to himself or ask advice from his own soul. The troubles ended

in 261, and as a result of the efforts of the peacemaking saint, the Church preserved her dignity in the eyes of the believers and even the Roman authorities.

St. Dionysius of Alexandria showed his peace-loving spirit also in the disputes over the baptism of heretics. The Roman Bishop St. Stephen severed ties with all the Churches of Africa and many Churches of the East because, following the example of St. Cyprian of Carthage, they baptized all heretics and even schismatics anew. Stephen of Rome is also venerated by the Church as a Saint (commemorated on 2/15 August). St. Dionysius corresponded with both the Roman Bishop and a number of Roman presbyters, hoping through them to incline all to peace. His efforts were crowned with success. Communion was restored under the Roman Bishop St. Sixtus II in 257 or 258, and under the next Bishop of Rome, St. Dionysius, the dispute within the Church subsided and peace returned. The Churches of Rome and Carthage both retained their old customs, “believing they were free in their opinions, while the opposing opinion was not considered as heretical”, as Baronius says. Unfortunately, not all in the African Churches had a spirit of peace. Some insensible followers of St. Cyprian later stood behind the Donatist schism and finally split from the Church.

Great internal troubles afflicted the Church before the persecutions of Diocletian. Eusebius of Caesarea in his *Ecclesiastical History* mentions that in those days it was believed that the persecution punished the Christians for the strife within the Church. “We envied and reviled each other, and were almost, as it were, taking up arms against one another, hierarchs assailing hierarchs with words like spears, and laymen forming parties against laymen... and thus we added one wickedness to another. And our alleged shepherds, casting aside the precept of piety, were excited to conflicts with one another, and did nothing else than heap up strifes and threats and jealousy and enmity and hatred toward each other, like tyrants eagerly endeavoring to assert their power” (Book 8, Chapter 1). Although Eusebius mentions this briefly and reluctantly, in his account the internal Church divisions are cited as the only spiritual reason for the persecution.

One of the best-known divisions within the Church occurred in Antioch in the second half of the fourth century. Two Orthodox groups opposed each other; the Eustathians (after the unjustly deposed St. Eustathius of Antioch) were supported by St. Athanasius of Alexandria, the Bishop of Rome and the entire West, while St. Meletius found support among the Eastern Fathers. Efforts to achieve reconciliation were started at once. According to Baronius, the Council of 378 ruled that each bishop be in charge of his own flock, and unification would take place after one of them dies. However, the parties were not ready to accept this ruling. St. Meletius died in 381, after the Second Ecumenical Council. Baronius mentions that after the death of St. Meletius some “wisest and oldest” people including St. Gregory of Nazianzus suggested that a new Bishop should not be appointed. However, St. Flavian replaced St. Meletius and the division continued. To many this meant violation of the previous agreements, and objections were raised. For example, the Roman Church did not recognize the election of Flavian, supporting Bishop Paulinus. After Paulinus died in 382, Evagrius was elected bishop in his stead. Now the other party broke the previous agreements, and all bishops of the East opposed him. However, according to Baronius, the Roman Church sanctioned the election of Evagrius. He mentions that he was elected “by the will of the Roman Bishop”. After Evagrius

died around 384, it was decided not to appoint a bishop in his stead, however, the division was not healed and the Eustathians were left without a bishop. Flavian was not yet recognized in the West; in 391 they tried to summon him for trial at the Council of the Western Church. The *Histories* of Socrates and Sozomenus even call the Meletians schismatics, but this appellation is just a term of abuse. In reality the Church held neither party for schismatic. This division within the Church was mentioned by St. John Chrysostom. In the 380s, when he was a presbyter in Antioch, he sided with Sts. Meletius and Flavian. What was St. John's attitude to the division he was himself involved in? After 387 he wrote an exegesis on Paul's *Epistle to the Ephesians*. In the 11th homily of this exegesis St. John directly mentions the Eustathians: "Do you think it is enough for them to be called Orthodox, although the grace of ordination has perished among them? Of what use can anything else be if the latter is not observed? One must stand equally firmly for the faith and for the grace of priesthood." When Chrysostom says "the grace of ordination has perished among them" he means that the Eustathians no longer had a bishop. Still, the words of denunciation are so harsh that one might think St. John does not hold the Eustathians for Orthodox. But this impression is wrong, because then he says: "we are ready to give up our authority to anyone you name for the sake of unity in the Church". The 11th homily shows that in the times of the deepest divisions in Antioch, although he denounced the opposing party, for the sake of peace and Church unity St. John was ready to give up his power in favor of his opponents. Few people could admonish the opposing party and at the same time agree to obey it for the sake of peace. It must have been this approach that eventually reconciled the two branches of the Church. Blessed Theodoret of Cyrrhus praises the Antiochian Bishop Alexander who, due to his humble ways, managed to restore peace among the Orthodox. Book 7 of Theodoret's *Ecclesiastical History* describes how Bishop Alexander himself came to the Eustathian church for final reconciliation, and the square was crowded with people who rejoiced in the end of the division.

St. John Chrysostom was so dedicated to ecclesiastical peace, that he accepted persecution and even death for its sake. Although he was unjustly condemned by the Council *ad Quercum* in Chalcedon, he treated his persecutors with love. On many occasions he stopped rebellions among his faithful and, as he was leaving Constantinople, he asked them to obey the new Bishop, his persecutor. In his last discourses St. John even enjoined his benefactors to donate money as generously to his persecutors as they had previously to him. This is a genuine and powerful love of peace. The unjust treatment of St. John Chrysostom divided the Church. The West stopped communion with the East, and this split continued until Chrysostom was posthumously rehabilitated. The people of Constantinople did not attend those churches where his name was not remembered. It is beyond any doubt that both parties in this dispute were Orthodox. Professor Kartashev in his book *Ecumenical Councils* mentions that the final reconciliation with Chrysostom's supporters took place in 438 under Archbishop St. Proclus, when the saint's relics were solemnly translated. This means that the division lasted for over 30 years. Although all the Local Churches had resumed communion, the Third Ecumenical Council had taken place and the name of St. John Chrysostom had been put on the diptychs, the most dedicated followers of the Holy Father probably did not believe in the former persecutors' sincerity. They must have ignored simple logical arguments concerning their "isolation". Professor Kartashev mentions that Archbishop Proclus pleaded with the Imperial Authorities to transfer the Saint's relics in order to pacify the people.

One more division within the Church took place during the lifetime of St. John Chrysostom. St. Epiphanius of Cyprus demanded that St. John anathematize Origen, and, when Chrysostom refused, the Cypriot and the Constantinopolitan *cathedras* became split. It was for the same reason that the Cypriot Church was for a short time divided from the Church of Jerusalem. Much later, at the Fifth Ecumenical Council, Origen was anathematized. Although the division had a theological background and the Cypriot Church foresaw the future, nobody now blames the opposing party for its veneration of Origen. This means that genuine love of peace sometimes excuses even formal error.

St. Gregory the Theologian was also involved in one internal division and took part in reconciliation. His confessor, St. Gregory of Nazianzus, signed a synodal document that contained erroneous teachings of the faith. This caused a number of monks to split from him. The dissenters were strict followers of the Nicene Council. Both Holy Fathers worked painstakingly to restore unity. They uttered no threats or anathemas against the dissenters, who, in their turn, were also sober and moderate in their judgments. In his *Discourse on Peace*, St. Gregory never reproaches his opponents; he even says that they protected him against third parties more than refuted him. The *Discourse of Peace* mentions that some dissident monks were even ordained by bishops who sympathized with them. This means that there were bishops among the dissenters. How did St. Gregory treat those presbyters who were ordained by the opposing party outside their own canonical territory? Naturally, he treated them like his brothers, without any hostility. This is how he describes it: “Those who were ordained by the leaders of the dissenters, since they were ordained for the sake of piety and to aid suffering Orthodoxy, we accepted with love, and we treated them as brothers rather than enemies; we embraced those who for a short time rose against us for the sake of the heritage of their fathers – rose in a brotherly way, not malevolently. We did not praise their enmity, but we did laud their zeal, because disagreement in the name of piety is much better than agreement in the name of passion.” This spiritual stand serves as a forewarning to those who are prepared to dedicate themselves entirely to internal disputes. On the other hand, this is a forewarning to those who hope to achieve unity by coercion and accusations directed at the opposing party. Truly, disagreement for the sake of piety is the Church’s strongest weapon against false doctrines, coercion of civil authorities and moral faults. Disagreement for the sake of piety has a great healing effect, but it should be combined with love of peace and humility. St. Gregory shows his humility in the *Discourse on Peace*: “Because of our strong love of God and Christ, we have divided Christ; because of the Truth, we began bearing false witness against each other; because of Love, we learned to hate.” The humility of St. Gregory turns into self-deprecation in the following phrases from the same Discourse: “the evil one tore apart the undivided, indivisible and whole-woven tunic, appropriated all of it and managed to do through us what he failed to do through the crucifiers of Christ.” These words show that the Holy Father, in his striving for peace, humiliated himself to an extraordinary degree, comparing himself to those who crucified Christ. This, because he blamed himself for his part in the division. And should not all Orthodox Christians, following the example of St. Gregory, blame themselves for divisions within the Church—some for their leniency towards sins, others for excessive denunciation?

St. Basil the Great also was not spared reproaches of the zealots. Wishing to reconcile the weak of will, he sometimes refrained from mentioning in his homilies the divinity of the Holy Spirit. This provoked disputes and dissensions among the dedicated followers of the Nicene Creed. Some even broke communion with him and looked for support in the Western Church. In the *Epistle* to Italic and Gallic Bishops, St. Basil, together with 32 bishops including St. Gregory the Theologian and St. Meletius of Antioch, says that alongside the persecutions of the Arians, the Church suffered from dissension among the Orthodox. The *Epistle* says literally that divisions among the Orthodox had driven the Church “to utmost exhaustion”. However, history knows of no persecution of the zealots by St. Basil. He never called them schismatics. He merely lamented the division within the Church and wrote many reconciliatory letters to the Roman bishop. However, while he treated the zealots with love, he opposed false teachings and heresies uncompromisingly.

St. Athanasius the Great suffered many misfortunes at the hands of both Arians and his Orthodox brothers. The Arians maliciously sowed among the Orthodox discontent against St. Athanasius, so that the entire Council of Antioch was divided from him. St. Athanasius did not live to see reconciliation with his unjust judges. The *Acts* of the Antiochian Council are included in the *Book of Canons*, and responsibility for the persecution of the Holy Father lies with the Arians rather than the Orthodox who were deceived by them.

St. Cyril of Alexandria is also praised by the Church for his love of peace. After the Third Ecumenical Council the entire Church of Antioch was divided. The *Acts* of the Third Ecumenical Council explicitly denounce the Council of the Antiochian Church for its disagreement with the deposition of Nestorius. However, St. Cyril understood that most of the Antiochian Fathers were Orthodox and their deeds were not worthy of division. For this reason, St. Cyril entered into reconciliatory correspondence with Archbishop John of Antioch. This correspondence yielded results, and peace was restored, although the dedicated supporters of Nestorius eventually left the Church. In Antioch the peacemaker was Blessed Theodoret of Cyrrhus who made a reconciliatory confession of faith. St. Cyril of Alexandria was so bold in his peacemaking efforts, that he even announced reconciliation without first asking the opinion of all the Fathers who had taken part in the Third Ecumenical Council. His audacity was accepted by everybody. This example shows that when the confession of faith is Orthodox, one should strive for peace and unity rather than enumerate the opposing party’s evident sins and demand repentance.

However, sometimes the Lord does not bless reconciliation and even supports division for the sake of rectifying sins. This pertains to both heresies and ordinary divisions within the Church. Such an event is described in the *Sacred History* of Sulpicius Severus (Book 2, Chapter 46). In the late fourth century, some Gallic and Hispanic bishops insisted that the civil authorities put sectarians to death. St. Martin of Tours firmly opposed the nascent Inquisition and stopped communion with the proponents of capital punishment. The Emperor made great efforts to persuade Martin to reconcile with the other bishops. One tends to believe that the Emperor was sincere in his desire for peace. Once St. Martin even agreed to reconciliation but then changed his mind. Sulpicius Severus relates that an angel appeared to St. Martin and approved his stance. However, in punishment for the erroneous, though short, reconciliation,

St. Marin lost his former power to heal the ailing. After that the Holy Father lived sixteen more years and never took part in episcopal meetings or synods. Evidently, the Holy Father himself and the other bishops were Orthodox. This incident shows that when a sin stands in the way of unity, the sin should not be ignored; it is better to postpone reunification on shaky grounds for the sake of a future great, glorious and durable peace. In this event the responsibility for the continuing division lies with those few who perpetrate the sin, rather than the multitude of the Orthodox who are divided by the sin.

Peace and unity within the Church always unite within themselves not only those who live on earth, but also the Heavenly Church. If the faith is distorted, perpetrators of the innovations become divided from the entire Heavenly Church. Genuine reconciliation is not possible without return to the true confession, that is, without reconciliation with the Heavenly Church; any other peacemaking efforts prove futile and sow new discord. When, for the sake of an illusory ecclesiastical peace, many wanted to forget and repudiate the Fourth Ecumenical Council, the compromise caused new divisions. Partisans of the unacceptable reconciliation with the Monophysites, the followers of the *Henoticon*, were explicitly denounced by the Church, but in those days even the Orthodox were not spared divisions. For example, under the Holy Patriarchs of Constantinople Euphemius and St. Macedonius II many people were split from their bishops. The *Ecclesiastical History* of Evagrius Scholasticus (Book 3, Chapter 31) tells how Patriarch Macedonius made a confession which expounded the Orthodox faith correctly but did not mention the Fourth Ecumenical Council. In this way the Patriarch endeavored to heal the Monophysitic inclinations among his flock. The Orthodox zealots could not accept it. Monasteries around Constantinople severed ties with the Patriarch. Evagrius Scholasticus mentions it in passing, while Professor Bolotov in his *Lectures on the History of the Ancient Church* explains that in those years there were in almost every city Orthodox zealots who did not have communion with their bishops, siding instead with the Roman bishop for his unwavering loyalty to the Fourth Ecumenical Council. Professor Bolotov cites testimonies to the effect that when envoys of Roman bishops visited cities in the East, they stayed with the zealots, avoiding the Eastern bishops. It is obvious that no arguments about canonical territory and outside interference could in themselves reconcile the Church. Patriarchs Euphemius and Macedonius began at once and are to this day still venerated as Saints. The division ended in 519 by reconciliation with both the Roman Church and zealots. Initially Rome demanded that the names of Patriarchs Euphemius and Macedonius be taken off the diptychs for their compromises. However, the Church of Constantinople ruled that they were Orthodox, and the division within the Church was no one's lapse into heresy or schism.

The next internal division occurred during and after the Fifth Ecumenical Council because of the dispute over the *Three Chapters*. Most of those who opposed the denunciation of the *Three Chapters* were Orthodox. The Council treated them with understanding and did not condemn proponents of *Three Chapters* themselves. This dispute even brought about a temporary split between Rome and Constantinople. After they had been reconciled and Rome approved the Fifth Ecumenical Council, dissent arose in the Western Church. Most people in the West believed that the Fifth Ecumenical Council made concessions to the Monophysites. This caused all Churches in Africa, Spain, Gaul and North Italy to rise against Rome and Constantinople. Bishops of these lands at their synods severely criticized the Roman bishop

for his condemnation of the *Three Chapters* and called him heterodox. Evidently, they were wrong, but Rome immediately started her peacemaking efforts. For many years Roman bishops one after another sent letters of reconciliation to their opponents. Neither Rome nor Constantinople denounced the unreasonable ones. Pope St. Gregory the Great was especially insistent in his peacemaking efforts. Professor Bolotov mentions that Pope Gregory did not think that proponents of the *Three Chapters* had seceded from the Church and maintained communion with those of them who would. In his opinion, their deeds could not justify a severe treatment. For the sake of peace in the Truth, Pope Gregory even passed the Fifth Ecumenical Council over in silence. Eventual reconciliation took place after the Sixth Ecumenical Council. The life of the Holy Martyr Hermenegild shows that proponents of *Three Chapters* were considered Orthodox. The Church where the Saint was martyred opposed denunciation of the *Three Chapters* and was split from Rome.

After the Seventh Ecumenical Council the Church was divided over the recognition of priests who had been ordained for money. St. Theodore the Studite in his *Epistle to Arsenius* mentions that Holy Patriarch St. Tarasius admitted them to priesthood after penance, although it caused great discontent among monks.

The division that came about in Constantinople in 796 was caused by the non-canonical marriage of Emperor Constantine VI, who made his first wife take the veil and married another woman. Although Patriarch Tarasius denounced this marriage, he did not initially punish the priest who celebrated it. In his *Epistle to Monk Simon*, Venerable Theodore says that he himself and many other monks were exiled by the civil authorities after they had stopped communion with Patriarch Tarasius. Still, the Patriarch wanted to meet them for the sake of reconciliation. In his *Epistle to Patriarch Nicephorus*, St. Theodore outlines the difficult conversation between the monks and their Patriarch. The conversation was opened with the harsh accusatory words of St. Theodore: "That we have no part with you either in this age or in the coming one, for you allow an adulterer to have communion with your holiness". St. Tarasius took no offense over these words of his opponents; on the contrary, he tried to assure them of his adherence to the moral teachings of the Church. In his *Epistle to Monk Simon*, Venerable Theodore mentions that the Patriarch even approved of the monks' attitude. Due to the wisdom of St. Tarasius, peace was restored and the priest who had celebrated the illegal marriage was prohibited to officiate. However, nine years later, in 806, the next Patriarch St. Nicephorus, under the pressure from the civil authorities lifted the prohibition and admitted the perpetrator to the clergy of the Cathedral of Holy Wisdom. Venerable Theodore and his supporters initially tried to persuade the new Patriarch to correct the mistake. When they failed, the division resumed. In his *Epistle to Athanasius*, St. Theodore describes how, for their firm opposition against the adulterous marriage, he and other abbots, monks and two bishops were deposed and exiled. St. Theodore himself, along with his allies (including his brother, St. Joseph the Confessor, Archbishop of Thessalonika), were deposed and anathematized by a synod of bishops in 809, chaired by St. Nicephorus. Although few people sided with St. Theodore openly, sympathy with his sufferings for the truth was great. In 811, reconciliation took place. The priest who had celebrated the illegal marriage was again prohibited to officiate and St. Theodore sent a letter to all his partisans enjoining them to recognize the Patriarch. The reconciliation between St. Nicephorus and St. Theodore proved to be very durable. When in 815 the Emperor

unleashed a new iconoclastic persecution, the most dedicated allies of the exiled Patriarch Nicephorus were his former opponents, the disciples of Theodore the Studite. Venerable Theodore wrote the Patriarch letters full of brotherly love, and when they met after several years of exile, the former enemies were crying for joy. They both died in exile as confessors and were canonized by the Church. Reconciliation of their partisans proved to be more complicated to achieve. In his *Epistle to Anthony, Abbot of the Convent of St. Peter and his Monks*, dated 811, St. Theodore the Studite turns to those of his disciples who were still persecuted despite the fact that reconciliation was under way. He enjoins them to resume communion with the Patriarch and bishops, otherwise “we will not gain victory, but our excessive striving for justice may cost us the good that we have gained by our efforts so far”. In the same letter he assures his supporters that they are persecuted for the truth and that the attitude one has towards them shows which of the bishops are true shepherds and which are false ones. We can see in this letter of St. Theodore that his reconciliation was not hindered by his being persecuted by “false shepherds”; yet he treated with understanding the reserve and caution of those of his supporters who did not want to rush into reunification. The letter, while suggesting reunification with the Patriarch, does not force or coerce, but is full of brotherly love and understanding.

Soon after the triumph of Orthodoxy over Iconoclasm, a new division arose within the Church. The heads of both parties, Patriarchs Saints Ignatius and Photius, were subsequently canonized by the Church. The short life of the Holy Patriarch Ignatius mentions that he was deposed under the pressure of the Imperial authorities for denouncing the crimes of Emperor Bardas. The bishops elected Photius patriarch, but the Imperial interference provoked an outcry among the monks. According to Professor Lebedev, a number of major monasteries and five metropolitans did not recognize Photius. The deposed Patriarch Ignatius prohibited everybody who recognized his illegal deposition to officiate. However, the newly elected Patriarch Photius was not a willing participant in the overthrow of his predecessor. He was made to accept the Patriarchate. In the ensuing split a majority sided with Patriarch Photius, while the opposing party enjoyed the monks’ unwavering support. Alongside Patriarch Ignatius, a principal opponent of Patriarch Photius was St. Nicholas, Abbot of Studium, a disciple of St. Theodore the Studite, canonized by the Church (commemorated on 4/17 February). In 867, after a *coup d’etat*, Photius was deposed and Ignatius once again occupied the Patriarchal See. Most of Photius’ opponents were deposed. The deposed Patriarch Photius humbly stopped officiating and patiently awaited justice and reconciliation. His patience in accepting his deposition won him the hearts of most people and clergy, and before Patriarch Ignatius died, resolute steps had been made towards reconciliation. After the death of Patriarch Ignatius, Photius reascended the Patriarchal See, and the division was gradually replaced by peace. The Church treated neither of the parties as schismatic; instead, she venerates both opponents as Saints. Each Patriarch is venerated for his virtue and for his zeal, and their mistakes regarded as being made not of their own will.

In the early tenth century the Church of Constantinople was divided yet again, when Emperor Leo the Wise after the death of his first three wives celebrated his fourth marriage, which Patriarch Nicholas Mystikos declined to recognize. After Nicholas was deposed and St. Euthymius I was elected in his stead, the Roman pope recognized the fourth marriage. The

divided Church entered a period of long troubles. Supporters of Patriarch Euthymius referred to the rules of the Western Church, which permitted a fourth marriage if the previous wives died. In their turn, supporters of Patriarch Nicholas cited the explicit prohibition of a fourth marriage by the canons of the Eastern Church. The split continued even after Patriarch Euthymius had been deposed and replaced with Patriarch Nicholas Mystikos. Professor Lebedev in his *Sketches of the Internal History of the Byzantine Eastern Church in the Ninth, Tenth and Eleventh Centuries* sides with the Nicholaites. Once he even calls the Euthymites apostates; however, it would be a mistake to treat either party as schismatic. The *Tomos* of Unification issued by the reconciliatory council of 920 never mentions acceptance of schismatics. This *Tomos* is included in the full edition of the Slavonic *Book of Canons*. It deals only with the pacification of disputes within the Church and prohibits a fourth marriage from that time on. The life of St. Basil the New explicitly denounces Patriarch Nicholas in the initial period of his reign and lauds the opposing party. Before and after the council of 920, Patriarch Nicholas wrote letters to his opponents full of brotherly love. He was ready to leave the Patriarchal See for the sake of peace and forewarned his unreasonable supporters set on persecution. The attitude of Patriarch Nicholas to peace can be seen in this extract from his letter: "I am utterly confused and tossed as if in an impassable sea between both parties, hoping solely for Divine Providence and Dispensation, as no human art is of use. It would be strange and unreasonable to abandon my allies and desert to the opponents; but the unwillingness of the dissenters to obey our word holds us against our will from unifying with them." These words show that the Patriarch for the sake of peace had even entertained thoughts of siding with his opponents. Even when some Euthymites after the council of 920 declined to reconcile, Patriarch Nicholas and his successors approached them with humility and did not look upon them as schismatics. They were treated as brothers who were not yet ready to reconcile. Indeed, a new division is quite different from a continuing status quo due to excessive caution. Only in the late tenth century, many years after Patriarch Euthymius had been put in the diptychs, a council denounced those who did not consent to reconciliation. The Church had waited for peace for almost a century without condemning those who were not yet prepared to accept it.

In the middle and at the end of the thirteenth century, the Church of Constantinople was living through one trouble after another. This was the age of divisions between zealots and "politicians". The split took an especially violent turn after the state authorities exiled Patriarch Arsenius Autorianus for his denunciations. Some people in the Church continued to support the deposed Patriarch. In more than one instance, when a "politician" ascended the Patriarchal See, the zealots stopped communion with him and were accused of schism by the "politicians", and when a zealot became Patriarch, many "politicians" were deposed and exiled. It would be of no use now trying to decide who was schismatic and when. It took a few decades to overcome the divisions.

Even more troubles afflicted the Church of Constantinople under the Turks. They were caused mostly by the interference of the Moslem authorities into ecclesiastical affairs and by attempts to involve secular rulers into the internal strife. History knows the divisions of 1467 between partisans of Patriarchs Mark II Xylokaravis and Symeon I, caused by suspicions of bribery; of 1504 between partisans of Patriarch Pachomius I and Joachim I; of 1522 between Patriarchs Jeremias I and Joannicius I; the division between Patriarchs Metrophanes III and

Jeremias II Tranos, when the former was later supported by Patriarch Pachomius II Patestos and Theoleptus II, later also deposed; and many other similar divisions. Such dissents lasted for many years so that one faction within the clergy recognized one patriarch deposed by the Turks and another faction, another patriarch. The situation was especially grave in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, when troubles, dissents and depositions of patriarchs succeeded without interruption. For example, Patriarch Cyril I Lucaris was six times elected to the Patriarchal See and five times deposed, Patriarchs Parthenius IV and Dionysius IV Mouselimes were elected five times, and several patriarchs occupied the See three or four times. Internal divisions in those years afflicted the Church without cease. However, these troubles providentially precluded the Patriarchate from falling into complete dependence of the Moslem authorities, because the people stubbornly rejected those patriarchs who were appointed contrary to their will.

Source: excerpt (slightly amended and corrected) from *Restoration of Eucharistic Communion and Overcoming of Divisions in the History of the Church*, by Fr. Nikolai Savchenko.

Additional significant points of division:

1. Between the First and Second Ecumenical Councils, when subtle forms of Arianism – now properly termed Semi-Arianism – continued to flourish, the brother-emperors of the East (Constantius) and West (Constant I) convened what was hoped to be an ecumenical council in 343 in Serdica (modern-day Sofia), to resolve the continuing struggle in the Church. The council was presided over by St. Hosius the Confessor, Bishop of Córdoba (+358), the great defender of St. Athanasius.

Before it was formally convened, however, most of the Eastern bishops withdrew from the council, and held a separate assembly in Philippopolis (Plovdiv, Bulgaria). The end result was mutual excommunications, depositions, and anathematizations between the Eastern and Western halves of the Church in an already divisive era.

2. During the reign of St. Methodius the Confessor (+847), Patriarch of Constantinople, the dispute between the office of the Patriarchate and the Studites reached its low point. The late abbot of the Studium Monastery, St. Theodore (+826), had broken communion with Patriarchs Saints Tarasius and Nicephorus and condemned them for the “heresy” of “Moechianism” (a theologized term applied to the acceptance of the non-canonical marriage of Emperor Constantine VI, mentioned above). After St. Theodore’s death, his spiritual son St. Naucratus (+847) became abbot. The Studites continued their overzealous opposition to other policies of the Patriarchate, and St. Methodius anathematized the entire Studium Monastery. He likewise demanded St. Naucratus and his fellow monks anathematize the writings of St. Theodore against Saints Tarasius and Nicephorus to be readmitted into the Church.

This division in the Constantinopolitan Church continued until after St. Methodius’ death, when the anathemas were eventually lifted and communion was restored by his successor, St. Ignatius, who was a supporter of the Studites at a highly-politicized time in the Royal City.

And just as St. Ignatius was an opponent of St. Photius the Great (mentioned above), so were the Studites...